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UNCLAS KINSHASA 000029

SIPDIS

PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

FROM BRAZZAVILLE EMBASSY OFFICE

E.O.12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: CONGO/B: GOVERNMENT MINISTERS ASKED TO RESIGN, NEW CABINET TO BE ANNOUNCED JAN 8

REF: 04 KINSHASA 02115

1. (SBU) ALL MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT, MINISTERIES INCLUDED, WERE ASKED TO SUBMIT THEIR RESIGNATIONS LATE EVENING JANUARY 5, 2004. WE ARE TOLD THAT THE CABINET WILL DRASTICALLY CHANGE, AND THAT PRESIDENT SASSOU WILL ANNOUNCE THE NEW CABINET ON SATURDAY, JANUARY 8, 2005. IN ADDITION OUR CONTACTS HAVE INFORMED US THAT NOT ONLY WILL COMPOSITION CHANGE, BUT THE CUMBERSOME 37 MEMBER CABINET WILL BE REDUCED TO AROUND 26 MEMBERS OR LESS. THE GOAL OF THE CABINET SHUFFLE, WHICH HAD BEEN RUMORED FOR SOME TIME, IS TO POSITION HIMSELF MORE AS A REFORMER, AND HAVE MORE PEOPLE AROUND HIM THAT CAN ENSURE THAT THE COUNTRY STAYS ON THE RIGHT TRACK FOR IMF AND BEGIN THE HARDER TASK OF POLITICAL REFORM. THERE ARE POLITICAL RISKS TO THE CABINET RESHUFFLE SINCE MOST OF THE INNER CIRCLE ARE FROM OTHER NORTHERN ETHNIC GROUPS WHO HELPED HIM WIN THE 1997-1999 WARS AND ARE ALREADY UNHAPPY BECAUSE THE PURSE STRINGS ARE TIGHTER WITH THE IMF WATCHING. HOWEVER, AS REPORTED REFTTEL, PRESIDENT SASSOU IS TRYING TO APPEAR TO BE A REFORMER AND WANTS TO ESTABLISH HIS NEW UNION OF THE REPUBLIC PARTY, BREAKING AWAY FROM THE OLD PCT PARTY HARDLINERS, MANY HAILING FROM THE OLD SOVIET DAYS. THE CABINET SHUFFLE IS HIS PUBLIC STEP IN THAT DIRECTION. POST WILL REPORT FURTHER ONCE NEW CABINET IS ANNOUNCED JAN 8.

2. BRAZZAVILLE EMBASSY OFFICE - SANDERS.

MEECE